



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



CODE TALKER HONORING CEREMONY

Last Friday, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Department of Veterans Affairs hosted a Code Talker Honoring Ceremony for WWI Code Talker Guy George Chapman.

Senator Mike Rounds was the keynote speaker and presented the award to Guy's family.

The Code Talkers used their complex and unwritten language to craft a code so indecipherable, it was never broken by the enemy. Code Talkers were praised for their speed and accuracy in relaying tactics, troop movements and orders under great risk in key battles.



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SDNG NAMES LIEUTENANT OF THE YEAR

The South Dakota National Guard selected 1st Lt. Justin Allbee, of Watertown, as its Lieutenant of the Year and recipient of the Lt. Col. John J. Steele Award.

Allbee, who serves as a signal officer with Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion, received the award as the most exceptional lieutenant after competing against lieutenants from several of the SDNG's major commands.

"Lieutenant Allbee has worked hard to ensure the communications section is at a high state of readiness, as well as ensuring the battalion remains at a high state of communications readiness," said Capt. Paul Giovanetti, HHB, 1-147th commander. "He has proven his high level of proficiency in any task given to him in this battalion."

The Lt. Col. John J. Steele Award was established in 1968 to annually recognize the most outstanding lieutenant in the SDNG. Selection is based on exceptional qualities of leadership, values and performance.

"I am genuinely humbled. It is an honor not only to be selected from the 1-147th but the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and also the great state of South Dakota for this award," said Allbee. "I am incredibly grateful I was allowed to compete and selected as the Lieutenant of the Year for 2020."

Allbee is a 2012 graduate of Minnesota State University Moorhead, where he earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Graphic Communications. On the civilian side, Allbee is the president at Gator Liftgates, LLC of Watertown, where he oversees company operations, production, sales, engineering, marketing, accounting, and human resources.

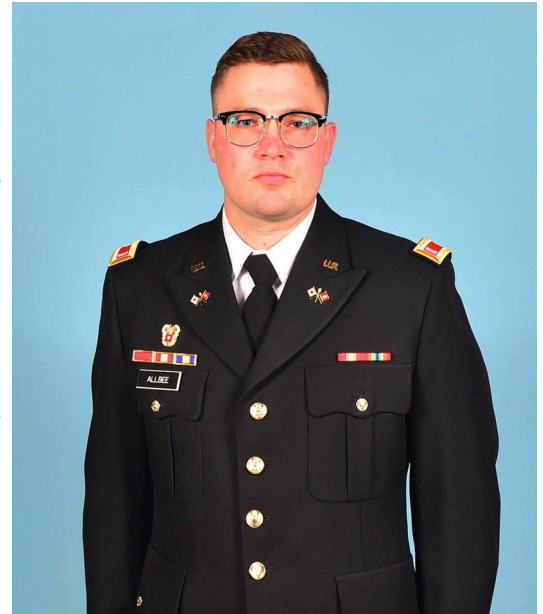
Other officers representing their major command for this year's award competition were 1st Lt. Jacob Erpenbach from the 114th Fighter Wing and 2nd Lt. Cole Huber from the 109th Regional Support Group.

Although receiving Lieutenant of the Year honors is a huge accomplishment for Allbee, he is also proud of what the award represents beyond himself.

"The 147th Field Artillery Battalion collectively is a prestigious unit that has a long history of serving the country and South Dakota," said Allbee. "We take care of soldiers, and we take care of one another. The award is not a reflection of me but a representation of my leaders, mentors, and, most importantly, all of the soldiers that have taught me what makes a great leader."

Allbee credits his family for making this award possible, as well as his military career.

"This award, and quite frankly, my entire career would not be possible without the support from my wife, Carmen, and my two sons Atlas and Porter," said Allbee. "They are always the driving force for what I do; I am always appreciative of their encouragement. I still have a long road to travel in my career, but it's always nice to find some recognition that you are doing something right along the way."



SDNG SELECTS WARRANT OFFICER OF THE YEAR

The South Dakota Army National Guard selected a Woonsocket man as its Warrant Officer of the Year and recipient of the Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael F. O'Connor Award.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Joel Russel, primary training, advising, and counseling officer for 1st Battalion, 196th Regional Training Institute, received the award as the most exceptional warrant officer after competing against warrant officers from several of the SDARNG's major commands.

The CW4 Michael F. O'Connor Award was established in 2000 to recognize the most outstanding SDARNG Warrant Officer of the past year. Criterion for the award is based on exceptional qualities of technical knowledge, leadership, dedication and initiative.

"It's a great honor to receive this award," said Russel. "I've seen others that I respect win this award and it is really neat to be honored with it."

"The reputation of Mr. Russel as a disciplined, articulate, capable soldier - willing and able to help his unit, its candidates, and fellow cadre - supported our goal of leaving the organization better than we found it," said Lt. Col. Troy Ness, 1-196th RTI commander. "Respectful to subordinates, peers and commanders at all levels, he mirrors the reputation of the man in which the Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael F. O'Connor Warrant Officer of the year award is named."

Russel enlisted in the SDARNG in 1992 and was assigned to the 665th Maintenance Company in Mitchell. Over the next 28 years, he served in many different units including Company B, 139th Brigade Support Battalion; Forward Support Company, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion; and the 1-196th RTI.

Russel is also a war veteran and completed a deployment to Iraq and Kuwait in 2011 with the 139th Brigade Support Battalion.

In addition to his military duties, Russel holds many positions in his hometown of Woonsocket, including commander of American Legion Post 29, city council member and volunteer firefighter.

"My career has been a great experience and has helped prepare me and my community for the future," said Russel. "Everything I do through the military I transfer back to my family and my community. My family and the community make me stronger in the military and the military makes me stronger for my family and community."

Other warrant officers representing their major command for this year's award were CW3 Sandi Pasqualucci, Joint Force Headquarters; CW4 Seth Mendel, 196th Regional Training Institute; and WO1 David Goodwin, 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.

"This is not a me award, this is an us award," said Russel. "This is me and my wife and my family's award. Without them I would not be able to go and do what I do in the National Guard. They are the ones taking care of all of my jobs at home while I am gone. Thank you to my wife Dawn Russel, my kids, my family and my entire community."



SD GUARD WARRANT OFFICER CANDIDATE SCHOOL GRADUATES SOLDIERS

South Dakota Army National Guard graduated new warrant officers in a ceremony held at Camp Rapid in Rapid City, August 1.

The Warrant Officer Candidate School recruits soldiers to become warrant officers and subject matter experts of their respective fields. The program develops their leadership and communication skills to make them stronger leaders in their units.

This year's WOCS graduating class was unique in its combination of two different course options. Five of the WOCS soldiers took part in the "fast track course," which consisted of two consecutive weeks of training in South Dakota. The other six WOCS soldiers participated in the "traditional training course" from October 2019 through March 2020, one weekend a month during this time.



Before graduating, all WOCS soldiers completed training at the 200th Regional Training Institute, Fort McClellan in Anniston, Alabama. The soldiers were tested both physically and mentally, they were taught skills that prepared them as officers for the challenges that lay ahead.

Warrant officers make up the technical foundation of the U.S. Army, specializing in a technical area.

The warrant officer's duty is to help their fellow soldiers maintain, operate and integrate Army systems and equipment across the full spectrum of Army operations building the South Dakota Army National Guard into a stronger and united force.

WOCS graduates and their new unit assignments include:

WO1 Brian Bierema, Ordnance, 665th Surface Maintenance Company (Mitchell)

WO1 Tane Bramblee, Ordnance, Forward Support Company, 109th Engineer Battalion (Rapid City)

WO1 Randi Brickey, Adjutant General Corps, Joint Force Headquarters (Rapid City)

WO1 Joseph Dressler, Quartermaster, Joint Force Headquarters (Rapid City)

WO1 Christopher Johnston, Quartermaster, 109th Engineer Battalion (Rapid City)

WO1 Morgan Kiley, Quartermaster, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion (Watertown)

WO1 Stephen Morgan, Field Artillery, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion (Watertown)

WO1 Marty Nygren, Ordnance, 147th Forward Support Company (Watertown)

WO1 Robert Royer, Ordnance, 665th Surface Maintenance Company (Mitchell)

WO1 Jared Schrupp, Quartermaster, 881st Troop Command (Sturgis)

Staff Sgt. Stephanie Kinsella, Certificate of Eligibility

Staff Sgt. Eric Lesnar, Certificate of Eligibility.

RIBBON CUTTING AT ABERDEEN VA CBOC

SDDVA Secretary Whitlock attended a ribbon cutting ceremony Monday at the Aberdeen VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

This new clinic is 1,400 square feet larger than the previous location that served just over 2,400 veterans in FY19.

The new Aberdeen CBOC will be able to accommodate the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) model, an increase in tele-health capacity, and additional medicine capabilities.



STATE VETERANS HOME UPDATE



This week while in the Hills, the Rolling Thunder Chapter 2 from Brookings stopped by the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home and presented a bench for the residents to use.

Also, La Societe Des Quarante Hommes et Huit Chevaux (40 & 8) awarded the Home \$800 to purchase a 70" Smart TV for one of the neighborhoods. The funds were made available as part of their annual "Keep the Wheelchairs Rolling Contest." The funds were presented by Jason Standiford of the U.S. Navy.



VA PREPARES TO WELCOME VOLUNTEERS BACK TO HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today plans to gradually and safely reintroduce volunteers to its health care facilities.

While volunteers are important to the operation of VA services and programs, most volunteer activities have been paused to prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19.

“Just as our facilities are [gradually reinstating services](#), volunteers are slowly reintegrating into them,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Volunteers are an integral part of our health care teams, offering fundamental services. We look forward to their return.”

Some volunteer roles will be new, while others will stay the same, be modified, go virtual or remain paused as a pre-

caution to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Individual VA facilities will tailor the reintegration of volunteers based on the facilities’ operational needs and the volunteers’ abilities.

Volunteers can expect the following safety measures:

- **Phased reentry:** Volunteers are being asked to return to duty on an as-needed basis while maintaining physical distancing. VA asks that volunteers do not return to the facility unless they have been approved to do so.
- **Retraining:** Volunteers must complete an orientation and training on VA’s policies and procedures. This includes the proper use of personal protective equipment including face coverings.
- **Health screenings:** Volunteers, like staff and patients, must consent to being screened for COVID-19 exposure and symptoms prior to entering facilities.

These actions are being taken to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of Veterans, staff and volunteers.

Visit [VA Voluntary Service](#) for more information.



VA RESPONDS TO COVID-19 WITH SCHEDULE REVISIONS TO ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD IMPLEMENTATION

After delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) revised its previous schedule to convert facilities to its new electronic health record (EHR) capabilities with updated timelines for deployments in August in Columbus, Ohio, and October in Spokane, Washington.

The VA's [Office of Electronic Health Record Modernization \(OEHRM\)](#) has reengaged with the [VA Central Ohio Healthcare System](#) in Columbus to launch a [new patient-scheduling system](#) in August and resumed activities at [Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center](#) (VAMC) in Spokane, Washington, working toward an October implementation of the department's new EHR.

The new timeline will preserve the 10-year implementation schedule and the overall cost estimates of VA's EHR modernization program. After the conversion at these sites, the VA will bring other select facilities forward in the timeline.

"[After a period of delay](#) during which VAMCs focused on their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are pleased to have our Electronic Health Record Modernization team resume activities with our facilities to move forward with a program that will transform the VA and enhance veteran care," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "As we implement the new EHR solution at these facilities, we will continue to prioritize the safety of our veterans and our staff by following guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

The department will also deploy the new EHR solution at select Midwest facilities that feature a balance of small, medium and large sites in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and Michigan.

Beyond COVID-19, the VA strategy will remain flexible and agile while continuing to consider other factors that might require modifications to the order of facilities that will implement the new EHR solution.

The EHRM program will replace the VA's current Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (Vista) to store patient information and track all aspects of veteran care. The new EHR solution will link with the Department of Defense's health records to create a lifetime of seamless care for service members and veterans.

Transforming Health Care for Veterans, Revolutionizing Health Care for All

Over the next 10 years, VA will move from using its current electronic health record (EHR) system — the software that stores health information and tracks all aspects of patient care — to a new system that will link in with the Department of Defense's patient records and unify all VA facilities on one system. The program that will manage VA's steady transition to the new EHR is called Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM).



VA TO AWARD MORE THAN \$400 MILLION IN GRANTS TO END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it will begin awarding more than \$400 million in grants under the [Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program](#) (SSVF) to 266 non-profit organizations in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands on Oct. 1 of this year. South Dakota's Cornerstone Rescue Mission received over \$1.3 Million.

SSVF funding provides thousands of low-income veteran families around the nation with access to case management and other assistance to rapidly re-house veterans who become homeless or prevent veterans from becoming homeless.

"Helping veterans exit homelessness and remain in stable housing is more important now than ever," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "The Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program remains a vital resource to ensure that every veteran has a safe and stable place to call home, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic."

In fiscal year (FY) 2019, SSVF served 105,156 individuals, including 70,524 veterans and 20,608 children. As a result of these and other efforts, veteran homelessness has been cut in half since 2010's launch of the [Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness](#). Since then, the VA's homelessness programs and targeted housing vouchers provided by the [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) have placed hundreds of thousands of veterans and their family members into permanent housing or helped to prevent them from being homeless.

This year's grant recipients competed for funding under a Notice of Fund Availability published Dec. 5, 2019. The funding will support SSVF services in fiscal year 2021 which begins Oct. 1 and ends Sept. 30, 2021.

South Dakota's Cornerstone Rescue Mission will receive over \$1.3 million in grant funds. Visit [VA homeless SSVF](#) to view the list of 2020 grantees and to learn more about the program.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 24—Barrel House Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight—Sioux Falls
Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre
Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair
Sep 3-7—SD State Fair
Sep 5—DAV/727 Poker Run—Swiftel Center—Brookings
Sep 7—State Offices Closed
Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
Sep 18—POW/MIA Day Ceremony—Veterans Memorial Park—Sioux Falls—6:30 pm (CT)
Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)
Dec 1—Governor's State of the Budget Address—1:00 pm (CT)
Jan 12—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)
Jan 13—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception



The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will have a booth at the State Fair.

On Thursday, September 3, the Department will be located in front of the grandstands where the "Veterans Day at the Fair" program will be held.

On Friday-Monday, September 4-7, the Department will have a booth in the Expo Building.

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South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov>

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